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One of the most notable religious celebrations which London has seen in recent years took place last week, when the Eucharistic Congress was held under the presidency of Cardinal Vannutelli. The ecclesiastical functions in the Cathedral and the services and meetings latter over the Waterloo to Bowley events a day, and on the final day was held the procession through the streets, in which the Cardinal Legate was the central figure. He is shown in the above illustration on the ecclesiastic progress, preceded by his cross-bearer.

An Historic Procession: Cardinal Vannutelli, the Papal Legate at the Eucharistic Congress, Passing Through the Streets of London on Sunday Last

Written by - - - - A. SARSFIELD WARD. : **A MISSION TO GRÜNZBURG** : Illustrated by - - - W. G. SIMMONDS.

PART I

JOHN RAMSAY, sometime of the Garde Ecossaise of his Most Christian Majesty, sat motionless in his saddle, and looked across the valley towards the distant castle, with the dim red roofs clustered about its base. The night was intensely brilliant, the moon full, and the heavens luminous with great starry splashes. Naked rocks rose, gaunt, upon the east, and dense pine woods cloaked the gloomy slopes upon the west; but into the north he gazed, across the lands where the silver streak marked the river's course, and across the yellow patches that showed where the harvest lay ripening. Beyond he looked, to where tower and battlement frowned down upon the valley, to where Count Hugo of Klaüen dwelt in his sombre stronghold, to the invulnerable fastness looming, ominous and ugly, upon the mountain side—to iron-bound Grünzburg.

He listened intently, his head set slightly to one side, as though to detect some sound from behind. But the night was deadly still; and, evidently satisfied that no man pursued him, he resumed his way.

An hour later he was at the gates, and, after some preliminaries, he passed up the steep ascent, and was admitted to the castle. A man, tall and slim, and wearing a pointed black beard, received him as he entered. His horse had been taken to the stables, and now John Ramsay stood in the light streaming from the guardroom, a man to attract notice anywhere and at any time, as, upon his entrance, he did that of the fellows who sat around the fire, and of the tall captain of the guard.

Not great of stature, he was thick-set and of that build and bearing which mark a man muscular and hard. Square-jawed, with a wiry moustache, cut straight across above a grim mouth, and having his light red hair cropped close to his head, he seemed, every inch of him, a fighting man.

"The Count knows that I am here?" he asked, shortly.

"He has been told, as you requested, that one bearing important letters desired audience," replied the captain.

"And the packet?"

"Was placed in his hands."

"Well?"

"I am awaiting further orders."

"Ah," said John Ramsay; "then perhaps you will permit me to sit down until you receive further orders. I am near spent."

He sank, wearily, on to the bench outside the guardroom and leaned forward, resting his chin upon his hands. His high riding-boots were covered with mud, and mud also was upon his cloak, the yellow stains mingling with red ones that were not occasioned by mud. When he removed his steel cap to rest his aching head, a still bleeding cut showed through the cropped hair, evidently corresponding with a deep dint in the cap. It needed but slight penetration to perceive that John Ramsay had had a troublous journey to Grünzburg.

But a little while he rested, for a small pale-faced man, who was respectfully saluted by the captain, appeared, noiselessly, from the shadows, and stood before him, bowing slightly.

"His Excellency will receive the honourable captain," he said.

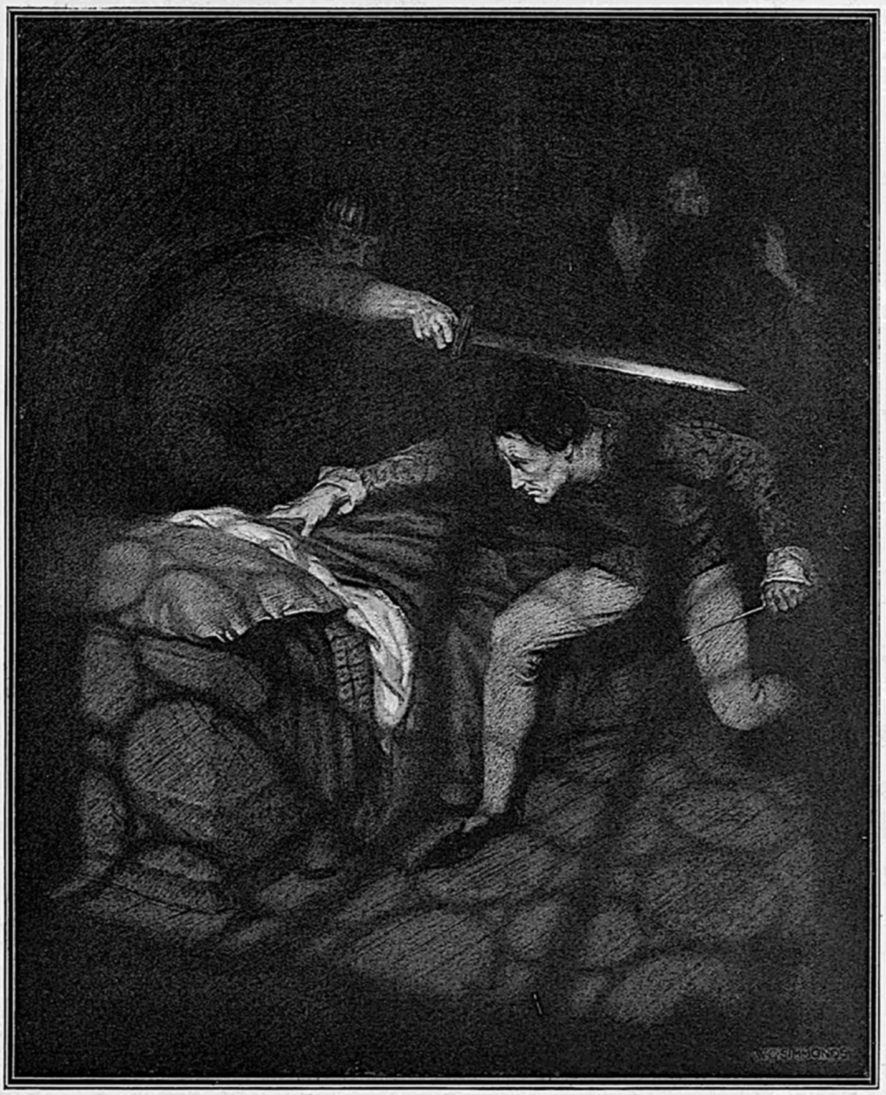
John Ramsay stood up, seeming to cast his weariness from him, clapped his steel cap on his wounded skull, and nodded unceremoniously.

The chamberlain ran a supercilious eye over his muddy and travel-stained person, and, with a slightly contemptuous gesture, indicated that he would lead the way. Walking noiselessly as a cat, in his soft pointed shoes, and catlike, too, in his velvet costume, he passed across a great paved court-yard and up a flight of narrow winding stairs to a long, dimly lit corridor. This traversed, he crossed a gallery and entered a lofty hall, through whose many windows the moonlight streamed, casting distorted pictures of the Fehlstein crest upon the polished floor. That hall—called the Hall of Justice—was destined to be, in the near future, the scene of a strange and tragic happening.

Through a door in the panelling went the chamberlain, and along another dim passage; then, by a smaller door, into a room where a man-at-arms stood stiffly beside a curtained archway, above which projected a lamp in a metal bracket.

Grounding his pike, the man saluted as the silent guide, followed by the red messenger who stamped noisily behind him, with short, measured steps passed into the anteroom beyond. A moment later, John Ramsay stood before one whom he instantly recognised to be no ordinary man.

A small panelled apartment, with a large open fireplace, wherein blazed a great fire; a table covered with documents, and bearing a silver candlestick having three sconces and three lighted candles; a massive carved oak chair near by the blazing logs, and, therein, the figure of one well advanced in years; a man with thin white hair and a skin like old parchment, with a huge emaciated frame, and large bony hands resting upon the chair-arms; far beneath the protruding and all but hairless brows, small eyes, strangely filmed, yet having a kind of lustre almost reptilian; an oppressive atmosphere—yet a sense of chill that seemed to emanate from the black-clad figure in the chair—such was John Ramsay's impression of the place and of its occupant—Count Hugo of Klaüen.



"The shriek of a great blade hewing the air."

For possibly a minute there was complete silence, while the Count sat with his peculiar eyes fixed upon the face of the messenger before him; and, indeed, John Ramsay's countenance was worthy of scrutiny. It was as though some cunning sculptor had roughly hewn an heroic head and left incomplete what, finished, would have been a masterpiece. The man had been handsome were he less rugged. As nature had made him he was simply strong—physically strong, ruddy and hirsute, and with a rather small, strongly aquiline nose, a hard mouth, and a long jaw that spoke of inflexible purpose.

"You have papers of import from our beloved cousin, Francis of Liemar?" said the Count, suddenly.

Ramsay bowed stiffly, and removed his steel cap, which, despite the disfavour wherewith the chamberlain had constantly eyed the headpiece, he had obstinately worn in the Count's presence. From some place in the interior he produced a packet, bound and sealed with the great seal of Liemar. This he handed to the Count—and immediately replaced the cap upon his head.

"Sir," said Hugo, with irritation, "you are a strange, uncourtly ambassador for our Royal neighbour to send to us. To what is Liemar come when common soldiers are entrusted with such missions!"

John Ramsay's ruddy face grew a shade paler. "Count," he replied, speaking the tongue with a barbarous accent, "you are of ancient line—of the house of Fehlstein. I, John Ramsay, can boast of blood as good, mayhap better. Of the embassy that journeyed from Liemar to present these documents at the Castle of Grünzburg, I alone remain. I am a plain soldier, and I only strive to do my duty. I wear my steel cap, without disrespect, to protect my skull."

"Ha!" said the Count, darting a quick glance at the chamberlain—"you are a man of spirit, and independent at that. But"—dropping his regal manner—"what do I understand? What evil chance, then, befell, whereby the learned Councillor von Kempen and all of his train are no more?"

"We were beset in the passes by a hundred armed robbers," answered Ramsay, shortly. "I alone survive; and, having possessed myself of the documents, I am here to present them to your Excellency, and to convey to his Highness whatever reply you may entrust to me."

"The Black Bear!" cried Hugo—"the man of blood and rapine! This is too much! That he should presume to lay hands upon a Councillor of Liemar!"

"Do I gather," inquired Ramsay, "that no mission from Liemar has reached your Excellency?"

"No message, good or ill, has come from Liemar to Grünzburg since I, the humble Hugo of Klaüen, have been Regent of Fehlstein."

"Then what of the holy Canon who journeyed hither in the first month of the year? What of the noble Heinrich Ritterstock, who set forth but six weeks agone? What of these two, and what of those who journeyed with them?" John Ramsay fixed his bright blue eyes scornfully upon the man before him. "Are such as these to be butchered in your mountains while you sit idle in sight of the shambles? Within three hours of the city, Johann von Kempen, beloved of all in Liemar, was slain by robbers, and, with him, a score other faithful subjects of the Prince! With murder done at your very gates, what wonder if I fear for my skull in a land so robber-ridden!"

The Count sprang up with surprising agility, and gripped

the back of his chair so that the knuckles stood out white upon his large hand. "Captain Ramsay," he said, harshly, "you are presumptuous!"

"I speak my mind," came the short reply. "Owing to the unfortunate state of Fehlstein, I find myself in my present position. I have presented that letter, which should have come by another hand, whereby you know my business; and, in the document which you hold, Francis, Prince of Liemar, makes formal offer of his hand in marriage to your ward, the Duchess Blanche of Fehlstein. I am no ambassador, save by evil chance, but a plain man-at-arms, so I can make no plea on the Prince's behalf; I can only bear to him your answer."

Hugo of Klaüen stood gripping the chair-back, and glancing from the chamberlain to Ramsay. At the end of his speech he swallowed, as though his resentment were some bitter potion, and forced a smile to his lips—a smile wherein his filmed eyes played no part.

"Captain Ramsay, Ambassador of Liemar," he said, "overlook my hasty utterance. I am old and growing querulous! Not another day shall pass ere a punitive force be sent against Ludovic the Bear. His depredations grow insupportable. Von Colberg will conduct you to your apartment, and, in the morning, you shall have audience of her Highness, the Duchess."

He bowed with a courtly grandeur not unimpressive, whereupon John Ramsay saluted stiffly, spun round upon his heel, and followed the chamberlain from the Count's presence.

. . . . . .

The apartment which had been allocated to the ambassador extraordinary from Liemar was small, low-ceiled and panelled, and had a large fireplace containing a blazing fire; in short, it was not unlike that wherein the interview with Hugo had taken place. This similarity, extending as it did to the unusual hexagonal shape, served to arouse John Ramsay's curiosity; so that, having assured himself of the security of the door, he threw open the solitary window and looked out.

A breeze had come from the west, bringing light, fleeting clouds, whereby the moon was sometimes partially and sometimes wholly obscured; but, through the clear air, the entire valley below was easily discernible. Grünzburg lay beneath him, slumbering peacefully, the moonlight furtively dancing upon the water flowing under the ancient bridge, and fashioning luminous shadows in the narrow, tortuous streets. Beyond, where the green of the corn was turning to gold and the outlying farmsteads dotted the slope, he traced the road by which he had travelled, marking its course up the mountain side almost to the mouth of the pass wherein he had left his companions lying in their blood—whence he, having with his own hand sped six of the marauders to their ultimate account, had escaped, unobserved, with the documents from Liemar.

Leaning perilously from the casement, he looked upward and downward—and then quietly reclosed the window. As he had suspected, he was lodged in the south-west tower of the fortress, and immediately below the apartment of the Count. By such devious ways had he been conducted there, that he had completely lost his bearings amid the maze of dim passages; but his location was now evident. Above was Hugo of Klaüen, and below, the base of the tower and the living rock, with the river flowing at the foot of all. Turning his attention to the panelling, the wary soldier examined the six sides of the room, paying especial attention to a panel hard by the fireplace, which returned a more hollow sound to his soft rapping than any of the others. Further inquiry led to the discovery that this panel was very slightly loose.

Bulking these facts together, and gratuitously adding certain evil rumours that had been whispered even so far abroad as Liemar, John Ramsay admitted to himself that, regarded impartially, his situation was not all that a Scottish gentleman might desire. The discovery—which rewarded his skill in noiselessly opening the door and peering along the passage—that a guard stood at the end, served only to confirm his unfavourable impression of Grünzburg.

To a table, spread with a tempting collation, his eye wandered hungrily; but, having submitted the viands to a close scrutiny, he reopened the window and threw his supper into the river, also emptying out the wine—and contented himself with a simple repast of meat and bread which he took from the saddle-bag lying in a corner, where, together with the rest of his portable property, it had been placed at his request. This Spartan fare he moistened with a draught from his flask; and, first cleansing and binding up his wounded head, he made himself as comfortable as circumstances permitted—not in the bed, but on the floor in the black shadows behind it.

Even if his proceedings had been watched, he told himself that he was now prepared for whatever might befall.

The fire burned lower and lower on the hearth, and he listened intently, in a vain endeavour to account for a muffled roaring that seemed to come from somewhere beneath his feet. Hour after hour wore on, till the fire was but a mass of smouldering ashes and the moonbeam that streamed, intermittently, through the window had crept from panel to panel, until it picked out the quaint carven device upon the loose one by the fireplace. The muffled roar continued without abatement, and the weary watcher had grown used to the sound, and was, indeed, beginning to doze, when a fresh noise attracted his attention, and set him instantly upon the alert. Fixing his eyes upon the suspicious panel and crouching close beside the bed, he began to snore stertorously.

A soft creak, an opening along the bottom of the panel, and a ghostly hand appeared out of the aperture. A cloud obscured the moon, but from the shadow came another creak. The cloud passed, and the pale light streamed again across the floor, to reveal the figure of a man framed in the black gap where the panel had been—a sallow-faced man, with dark pointed beard and moustache. His eyes glanced rapidly around the room, or, rather, his right eye did so. His left eye seemed in disagreement with its fellow, for it swung up, independently, as though to survey the ceiling. By this eye John Ramsay knew the man.

Stepping slightly forward, he of the odd eye took up the wine-flask from the table and turned to one who followed him through the aperture. The second midnight prowler was Von Colberg, the chamberlain; and the two, holding up the empty flask in the moonlight, and hearing the heavy snores from the bed, showed their teeth together in satisfied smiles.

"'Twas the wine," said John Ramsay to himself, regretfully, "and I threw away the trout and the capon!"

Gathering courage from the apparent coma of their victim, the two came boldly towards the bed, and Von Colberg drew from beneath his doublet a long, slender stiletto. Bending forward he laid his hand, in the darkness, upon that spot where he assumed the heart of the drugged man to be located. A saddle-bag and other articles being artistically arranged there, surprise at the contour of the recumbent form was the last emotion Von Colberg knew in life.

The shriek of a great blade hewing the air, a dull thud, a sound as of something spurting upon the oaken floor—and he of the eye stood smitten rigid with fear as the headless trunk of the Grand Chamberlain of Fehlstein collapsed, slowly, at his feet!

Helpless as a man of stone he stood, his left eye for once co-operating with its fellow, for both were fixed, in a glassy stare, upon the vague figure holding the huge, ensanguined sword. Through the darkness he saw that awful blade, and, as he glared, felt the point at his throat.

"Speak," said a voice, "and——!"

John Ramsay came forward into the moonlight and confronted the terror-stricken assassin. Skilfully he searched him and took possession of a murderous dagger. "What had you to do when I was despatched?" he demanded.

The man had no words; but the point of a sword is peerless as a *maître d'élocution*.

"My lord captain," he gasped, "we had to report that——"

"That I had departed—quite so! Go, now, before me, up the stairs, and stand within the door. Report that you have despatched me and then return. I shall be behind you!"

Not daring to demur, the fellow passed through the opening in the panel and up a steep, narrow stair, John Ramsay having a finger hooked in his belt behind, and the point of his sword against his spine. A gleam of light showed, presently, that they were come to the chamber above.

"Go on!" whispered the grim Scot.

The panel flew up, and the Count's apartment was revealed. Hugo still occupied the great carved chair, and he was so close that, had he so desired, Ramsay could have easily slain him. Turning his filmed eyes towards his emissary, he raised his brows in a silent query.

(*To be concluded.*)

A new serial by the famous novelist, F. Marion Crawford, which is entitled "Stradella," and will be found to be a worthy successor to "A Cigarette Maker's Romance," "A Roman Singer," "Soprano" and other well-known works by the same author, will shortly commence in the pages of THE GRAPHIC.

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Written by - - - - A. SARSFIELD WARD.

A MISSION TO GRÜNZBURG

Illustrated by - - - W. G. SIMMONDS.

PART II

"IT is done!" said the man, rapidly.

"Wine or steel?" came the cynical voice.

"Steel!" replied the other, shuddering at the prick of the point in his back.

"Good!" muttered Hugo. "Another week——" Then, aloud, he added, "Down with his red rat's carcass! Down with it!" And waved his hand in dismissal.

Back to the room below crept the cowed ruffian, the uncomfortable point, on this occasion, against his breast, as the Scot descended slowly before him.

"Is he like to come here?" asked Ramsay, when the lower panel was reclosed.

"No," replied the man. "He never looks upon them!"

This reply struck John Ramsay as being full of significance.

"Proceed with your work," he ordered. "Where do you throw them?"

"The cave——"

"Where is this cave?"

The man indicated the door in the panelling, and, with a grim nod, John Ramsay helped him to drag the body of the chamberlain across the floor, and soon was again upon the hidden stair, this time descending, with one hand holding the feet of Von Colberg, his fingers hooked in the velvet shoes, and with the other carrying the great sword. So they proceeded, the fellow who went first bearing the weight of the body, and chattering with dread of the man who came behind him. The roaring sound grew louder as they descended, until it became evident to Ramsay that it was occasioned by rapidly running water. From the distance they had come, he judged that they must be below the foundations of the castle, and, as if to confirm his impression, the stairway ended—and they were stumbling down a steep path, burrowing still further into the heart of the rock of Grünzburg. The air was damp and chill, and the sound of the water almost deafening. Then a faint light came from some mysterious source, so that he could vaguely discern the figure of the man before him. They had emerged into a small cave, and the fellow's voice came, "Lay him down—the torch."

Followed always by the long sword, the man produced from a niche a pine-torch and materials with which he ignited it. This being stuck in an iron ring fastened to the wall, John Ramsay was enabled to survey the gloomy chamber wherein he now stood.

It was some twenty feet square, being evidently a natural cavern artificially enlarged; and in what he assumed to be the northern wall a black gap marked the opening of a low tunnel. The furniture of this place was of a terrifying description, consisting of racks, screws, boots, branding-irons, and other dreadful instruments of like character. The man of the eye knelt in a corner of the roughly levelled floor, and, by means of a rusty metal ring, raised a square stone slab, whereupon the sound of rushing waters became even louder, and a current of air swirled around the chamber, almost extinguishing the flame of the torch. Grasping Von Colberg's body by the heels, he dragged it to the opening, and, with averted eyes, toppled the gruesome form into the blackness.

Even the sturdy soldier, who had earned for himself the soubriquet of "Iron John," was unable to check the shudder which that sight, and the thought it inspired, visited upon his person. Turning abruptly, he said, "You were of those who fell upon us in the mountains! What has Hugo of Klauen, Regent of Fehlstein, to do with Ludovic the Bear?"

Again the man grew wordless; but, at the approach of the sword-point, he burst out with a confession such as must have strained John Ramsay's credulity had he not known what he knew already. In a perfect torrent of words he poured forth the story of Castle Grünzburg—of the young Duchess Blanche—and of Hugo, her guardian.

The Regent, by a statute of the late Duke, remained absolute head of the State during the minority of the orphan Duchess, or until her marriage, when the regency passed to her consort. Since her romantic meeting with the Prince of Liemar in the previous year, she had been seen but little outside the city; and now John Ramsay learned why. She was virtually a prisoner in her own apartments! Not easily coerced, she resolutely defied her guardian, who had his own dark plans for her future. For the past three months she, and the one waiting-woman who had proved incorruptible, had been watched, night and day—to prevent communication with those of the officers of Grünzburg, who, were the truth known to them, would have defended their beautiful Duchess with their lives.

"It is given out, Excellency," the man declared, almost incoherent in his fright, "that she lies ill of a lingering sickness. The soldiery and the burghers know not the truth—nor suspect it. Count Hugo must have time for his plans to mature. Had the embassies from Francis reached him (and all Grünzburg known of their coming) his projects were ruined.

"In the mountains we waylaid them! All were slain, save only the holy Churchman. He lies in a dungeon here! Ludovic the Bear! There is *no* Ludovic the Bear! He and his followers were routed from their mountain fastness, and a company of Hugo's mercenaries installed there! Sometimes I, and sometimes Von Colberg, took command. Yesterday I had returned, secretly, and reported that none of the mission from Liemar—whereof we had news of the coming—were alive; but you won through to give me the lie; and so to me fell the task of making good——! Secrecy must be observed. We of the Count's number scarce half a score; the garrison, to a man, are the Duchess's, and the burghers ever ready to shout for her and for Francis of Liemar. There is a secret mode of entrance and egress, by which we come and go, and, also, there is a passage communicating with the apartments of the Duchess."

"I am ready," said the Duchess. "Do your work!"

At this point Ramsay checked his flow of words.

"Lead me to the Duchess," he said.

For a moment the other hesitated, taken aback by the limitless daring of the Scotsman. In the flickering torch-light he stared at the grim and ominous face, and perceived in the light blue eyes that which hastened his acquiescence. Taking the flaming torch from the ring, he led the way into the black mouth of the tunnel, followed by the captain and the long sword.

It proved to slope rapidly upward, the air growing ever fresher, until, the guide unlocking a low iron door, they emerged into a chapel. Crossing from north to south (neither the ruffian with crimes innumerable on his soul, nor the grim Celt, omitting to bow the knee before the altar), they descended to the crypt, and then plunged into a veritable maze of subterranean passages. They were mounting a stair that evidently led again to the surface, when Ramsay spoke, softly. "Lead me into a trap," he said, "and——!"

"My lord Captain," replied the man, hastily, unlocking another door, "you are in her Highness's apartments!"

John Ramsay looked about him, and realised that the man spoke the truth. They actually stood in what was evidently the anteroom of the bedchamber, and directly before them was a heavily curtained doorway, beside which, upon a couch, a woman lay dozing. Of those about the Duchess, she alone had remained, save for spies; and now, in this time of terror, she lay nightly a faithful watcher at her mistress's door. As they entered, she started up, and, seeing before her the sinister apparition bearing the great sword, pulled aside the curtains and staggered, inarticulate with terror, into the apartment beyond.

Uncertain how to act, the Scot, cannily keeping a stout hold upon the leather girdle of his guide, stood looking after her. The situation was critical, allowing of little time for reflection; yet, scarcely knowing what to do, he paused irresolute, and, while he hesitated, wondering how he should gain speech of the Duchess, the problem was solved.

The hangings parted again, and a white-clad figure appeared—a girlish, graceful figure, with bright tresses that fell, unbound, about gleaming shoulders peeping from the broidered night-robe, tresses that hung below the slim waist, and shone, in the light of the solitary candle illuminating the room, like burnished bronze. The face—a beautiful oval face—was pale, the arms outstretched, the brave eyes bright.

"I am ready," said the Duchess. "Do your work!"

The simple words told a pitiful tale, a tale of long days of misery and nights of dread. The Scotsman pulled himself up with a slight frown.

"Your Highness," he replied, "I can believe that appearances are against me; yet am I no bloody assassin, but John Ramsay, Captain of the Archer Guard of Francis of Liemar."

"Francis! You are from Francis!" The colour came and went in her cheeks; her big eyes searched the face of the man before her—noting the bandaged head, noting the curved nostril, the grim mouth—divining, with womanly quickness, the simple honesty and unflinching courage of this stranger who had appeared out of the night. With all his roughness of exterior, the Scottish captain was unmistakably a man of good blood; but ancient lineage counts for little, as this girl—for she was no more—knew to her cost. It was not, then, his noble bearing which reassured her. It was simply that her instinct showed her this rough soldier of fortune to be a man such as a woman can trust.

Gone was the haughty pride that had never deserted her through the past weeks of torment and doubt—that had upheld her, calm and regally scornful, when she rose in her night-robes and confronted him whom she believed to be her appointed executioner. Duchess Blanche of Fehlstein sank upon her knees and buried her beautiful face in her hands.

"Oh, God," she whispered, "I thank You—I thank You! My prayers are answered. You have sent me a friend!"

Then she rose, the quick red flushing her cheeks as she glanced down at her long, clinging garment. But John Ramsay gave her no time to speak. "Your Highness," he said quickly, "attire yourself with all speed. We must immediately leave the castle."

"But every exit from my apartments is watched, and I am cut off, in this remote wing, from all aid."

"Go, Duchess, and prepare," he replied. "We will find a way."

She never thought of questioning this strong, masterful man, but went like an obedient child. As she passed beyond the curtained door, Ramsay turned to his unwilling companion with one of his abrupt queries. "Where is the secret exit?" he demanded.

"From the crypt," was the answer.

"To where?"

"The river. We can gain the Lower Town. There are stairs to a ledge beside the underground stream."

So it came about that, wrapped in a dark travelling cloak and accompanied by her one faithful attendant, the Duchess of Fehlstein fled secretly from the castle that was hers by right of her ancient line—from the iron-bound home of her race. Protected by a foreign soldier, and guided by a foiled assassin, she bravely journeyed by the underground path, and a fearsome path it was to follow, that narrow, sloping way beside the inky torrent that poured from the bowels of the rock to leap downward to the river. The tunnel was barely high enough for a man to walk upright, and the roof and sides were dripping with moisture. After heavy rains the path was impracticable, said the man of the eye, who went first, bearing the torch; and, indeed, Ramsay was not sorry when he stood again beneath the blue of heaven.

"I dare swear Von Colberg came down quicker!" he said.

That night the house of Peter Dekker, Burgomaster of Grünzburg, was honoured by the presence of Duchess Blanche of Fehlstein, who, accompanied by a pale-faced serving lady, knocked and begged hospitality of his good dame like any poor homeless wayfarer.

. . . . . .

Hugo of Klauen suspected that all was not well with his affairs; he had a presentiment that something unpleasant

was about to happen—which presentiment was due to the discovery in the room reserved for privileged guests (such as the ambassador from Liemar) of the decapitated head of Von Colberg. This, he argued, together with the absence of the chamberlain's trunk, pointed to a flaw in the domestic arrangements of Castle Grunzburg. Upon summoning the man of the eye, and learning that he, too, was missing, the Count had serious misgivings.

Unable, for obvious reasons, to act otherwise than circumspectly, he spent the early part of the day following the coming of John Ramsay in no very placid state of mind. Those of the men who, seeking for preferment, had attached themselves to the Regent, seemed less obsequious than usual—or so he imagined; and Captain Maurice, the same who had received Ramsay on his arrival, almost openly refused to obey some order he gave him. For a moment he glared upon that insolent soldier, but something in the air of the guardroom, wherein this *rencontre* took place, caused him to change his mind about ordering the captain's arrest, and, instead, he strode from the place with evil things in his heart. Racked with dreadful doubts, he yet found himself impotent to put matters to the test. That his power, in some occult fashion, had slipped from him during the night like a discarded garment, he now fully realised. The garrison was virtually in revolt; yet, burdened with the knowledge of his secret deeds, he dared not act—he could only pace up and down his apartment like a caged wild thing. What had gone awry? Who had betrayed him? The gruesome secret of the guest-chamber could be known to none other than himself and those who dared not speak. The Scotsman! This mysterious atmosphere of impending ruin was in some way due to him; yet—the man with the eye had despatched him; had he not reported so? had not he, Hugo, heard the sounds from below that told of his body being dragged to the cave? But why had no report been made of Von Colberg's death? Where *was* the man of the eye? Hugo grew distracted.

At midday the first blow fell. He learnt that the Duchess was not in her apartments!

Some inkling of the truth began to dawn upon the darkness in his mind, when, upon summoning his personal attendant, he was answered by a man-at-arms whom he knew to be a favourite of his young ward's.

"Send Böhmer," he said, quickly, eyeing the man with open disfavour.

"He has gone, Excellency."

"He was here this morning."

"He has gone."

"Gone! Gone where?"

"I cannot say, Excellency."

"Then send Gratz."

"He has gone, Excellency!"

So it was with all whom he thought he could trust; and so it was that he began to see the jest that Fate had played upon him. He, whose jests with racks, thumbscrews, and the underground torrent had been so many, was now called upon to laugh, in turn!

He dismissed the man, and, although now in a state of almost pitiable apprehension, waited until nightfall ere taking a decisive step. Then, as the guard was being set, he came out into the courtyard, booted and cloaked, and called for his horse to be brought. Captain Maurice was on duty, and from his lips he heard what he knew to be the verdict of his debasement.

"You cannot leave the Castle, Excellency."

"By whose orders?"

"By order of her Highness the Duchess!"

The Count turned, without a word, and strode to the chapel. Into the blackness of the crypt he descended, and, with the key he always carried with him, made to open the secret door.

It was barred from the inner side!

Then did Hugo of Klauen see how truly the tables were turned; for he knew himself a prisoner in Castle Grunzburg!

. . . . . .

Many days passed, until a morning dawned when he heard the bells ringing in the town below; when he heard the shouts of the people. From his window he looked down, and the town was bedecked with banners and flags. The streets were alive with moving figures, some in the black and gold of Fehlstein, some in the gala dress of burghers, and some in a uniform at the sight whereof he hastily closed the lattice and strode about the place raving like a madman. It was the livery of Liemar! It was the marriage of Francis of Liemar to Blanche of Fehlstein!

Seated by the flaming logs, in the great oak chair, he heard the trumpets in the courtyard; he heard the ringing of the chapel bell, and sat immovable as a graven image. Some there were who looked in at the door, but he seemed unaware of their presence, sitting staring into the flames—and so they left him. Only when he received a touch on the shoulder did he look up, and then his yellow features became instantly contorted with furious rage. John Ramsay stood quietly watching him.

"Your Excellency is awaited in the Hall of Justice," he said.

Two men-at-arms appeared, and stood one on either side of the gaunt figure in the chair. The Count's eyes glanced, momentarily, to the door in the panelling; then, composing his features in a masklike immobility, he rose and followed the man to whom he owed the loss of a dukedom.

In the ancient Hall of Justice, Francis of Liemar presided over a tribunal of nobles and citizens of Fehlstein, met to pass sentence upon the man who had ruled them from this very stronghold wherein they now gathered. Such was justice in Grünzburg. Francis, Regent but a few hours, was called upon to pass judgment on his predecessor, and that this court would hesitate at the extreme penalty, if such sentence seemed fitting, none could suppose who saw the stern, set faces turned towards Hugo as he entered. Neither his age nor his dignity (for now, in his hour of shame, he carried himself regally) could move hearts steeled to the prayers of a beautiful Duchess—to the tears of a newly made bride.

Looking to the farther end of the hall, the Count perceived there the man of the eye, Böhmer, Gratz, and others who had been his confidants. He saw the captured leaders of the band with which he had supplanted that of Ludovic the Bear. He saw the holy Canon of St. Mark's, who had come in peace from Liemar, and who had been dragged, under cloak of night, to the secret entrance, and incarcerated in a filthy dungeon.

He heard the list of his misdeeds—or of some of them—recited to the court; of how he had maltreated his ward, and grossly abused his high trust; of how he had murdered scores of peaceful travellers, well knowing that the work would be laid to the account of the Bear; of how he had sought to assassinate John Ramsay.

Then he heard the grave voice of the President, demanding of him what he had to say in his defence.

Complete silence followed the question, all eyes being set upon the arraigned man. The bright sunlight flooded the hall, streaming in through the open windows, and the murmur of the river flowing around the rock of Grünzburg could be plainly heard. Even an occasional voice from the town, far below, sounded faintly, or a snatch of a song was wafted through the clear air—for the citizens kept holiday in honour of their young Duchess's marriage to the husband of her choice. All nature seemed peaceful, and the valley a valley of rest.

Upright between his guards stood Hugo of Klauen, his gaze set upon the grim face of John Ramsay, who stood beside Francis on the dais. The filmed eyes blazed out into sudden malignancy as he raised his clenched hands and shook them, in frenzied malediction, at the Scottish captain.

For an instant he stood thus, his whole quivering body bespeaking devilish anger; then, ere a hand could be raised to stay him, he bounded to an open window, leapt into the casement, and cast himself down into the flowing stream, two hundred feet below!

THE END

A new serial by the famous novelist, F. Marion Crawford, which is entitled "Stradella," and will be found to be a worthy successor to "A Cigarette Maker's Romance," "A Roman Singer," "Soprano" and other well-known works by the same author, will shortly commence in the pages of THE GRAPHIC.

There is only one opinion about "Izal;" it is an admirable disinfectant, quite safe, and most pleasant to use. Everyone should use it in times like the present, not because we are at all likely to have an outbreak of cholera in England, but because in this case the safe side is also the pleasant one. The Company sells it in the shape of fluids, powders, and soaps, all equally excellent.

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Introduction

The Graphic was a British weekly illustrated newspaper, first published on December 4, 1869, by William Luson Thomas's company Illustrated Newspapers Ltd. Thomas's brother, Lewis Samuel Thomas, was a co-founder. As a founder of this newspaper, Lewis took an active interest in its management. His premature death, in 1872, left a marked gap in the early history of the publication. It was established as a rival to the popular Illustrated London News.

The influence of The Graphic within the art world was immense, its many admirers included Vincent van Gogh, and Hubert von Herkomer.

It was published weekly until April 23, 1932. The title changed to The National Graphic between April 28 and July 14, 1932. Publication ceased after 3,266 issues. From 1890 until 1926, Luson Thomas's company, H. R. Baines & Co., published The Daily Graphic.

The Lost Story

This lost story was discovered by Harry Medawar and posted to The Sax Romer Society on February 17, 2021.

"This is the story Rohmer wrote after his first trip to Continental Europe where it is believed he stumbled upon the name "Sax Rohmer." It was written in 1905. Nothing in A. P. Watts' files indicated it was published though Elizabeth Rohmer believed it had been. Bob Briney, Larry Knapp, Gene Christie, George Vanderburgh, and myself have never located a copy. Thank you so much for sharing this."

- William Patrick Maynard

A.P. Watt Ltd (Agents)
20 John Street, London,
WC1N 2DR
UK

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Website: www.apwatt.co.uk/
Email: apw@apwatt.co.uk

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The Story

THE GRAPHIC, SEPTEMBER 19, 1908

A MISSION TO GRUNZBURG

Written by - - - -
A. SARSFIELD WARD.
Illustrated by - - -
W. G. SIMMONDS.

PART I

JOHN RAMSAY, sometime of the Garde Feossaise of his Most Christian Majesty, sat motionless in his saddle, and looked across the valley towards the distant castle, with the dim red roofs clustered about its base. The night was intensely brilliant, the moon full, and the heavens luminous with great starry splashes. Naked rocks rose, gaunt, upon the east, and dense pine woods cloaked the gloomy slopes upon the west; but into the north he gazed, across the lands where the silver streak marked the river's course, and across the yellow patches that showed where the harvest lay ripening. Beyond he looked, to where tower and battlement frowned down upon the valley, to where Count Hugo of Klauen dwelt in his sombre stronghold, to the invulnerable fastness looming, ominous and ugly, upon the mountain side—to iron-bound Grunzburg. He listened intently, his head set slightly to one side, as though to detect some sound from behind. But the night was deadly still; and, evidently satisfied that no man pursued him, he resumed his way.

An hour later he was at the gates, and, after some preliminaries, he passed up the steep ascent, and was admitted to the castle. A man, tall and slim, and wearing a pointed black beard, received him as he entered. His horse had been taken to the stables, and now John Ramsay stood in the light streaming from the guardroom, a man to attract notice anywhere and at any time, as, upon his entrance, he did that of the fellows who sat around the fire, and of the tall captain of the guard.

Not great of stature, he was thick-set and of that build and bearing which mark a man muscular and hard, Square-jawed, with a wiry moustache, cut straight across above a grim mouth, and having his light red hair cropped close to his head, he seemed, every inch of him, a fighting man.

"The Count knows that I am here?" he asked, shortly.

"He has been told, as you requested, that one bearing important letters desired audience," replied the captain.

"And the packet?"

"Was placed in his hands."

"Well?"

"I am awaiting further orders."

"Ah," said John Ramsay; "then perhaps you will permit me to sit down until you receive further orders. I am near spent."

He sank, wearily, on to the bench outside the guardroom and leaned forward, resting his chin upon his hands. His high riding-boots were covered with mud, and mud also was upon his cloak, the yellow stains mingling with red ones that were not occasioned by mud. When he removed his steel cap to rest his aching head, a still bleeding cut showed through the cropped

hair, evidently corresponding with a deep dint in the cap. It needed but slight penetration to perceive that John Ramsay had had a troublous journey to Grunzburg.

But a little while he rested, for a small pale-faced man, who was respectfully saluted by the captain, appeared, noiselessly, from the shadows, and stood before him, bowing slightly.

"His Excellency will receive the honourable captain," he said.

John Ramsay stood up, seeming to cast his weariness from him, clapped his steel cap on his wounded skull, and nodded unceremoniously.

The chamberlain ran a supercilious eye over his muddy and travel-stained person, and, with a slightly contemptuous gesture, indicated that he would lead the way. Walking noiselessly as a cat, in his soft pointed shoes, and catlike, too, in his velvet costume, he passed across a great paved courtyard and up a flight of narrow winding stairs to a long, dimly lit corridor. This traversed, he crossed a gallery and entered a lofty hall, through whose many windows the moonlight streamed, casting distorted pictures of the Fehlstein crest upon the polished floor. That hall—called the Hall of Justice—was destined to be, in the near future, the scene of a strange and tragic happening.

Through a door in the panelling went the chamberlain, and along another dim passage; then, by a smaller door, into a room where a man-at-arms stood stiffly beside a curtained archway, above which projected a lamp in a metal bracket.

Grounding his pike, the man saluted as the silent guide, followed by the red messenger who stamped noisily behind him, with short, measured steps passed into the anteroom beyond. A moment later, John Ramsay stood before one whom he instantly recognised to be no ordinary man.

A small panelled apartment, with a large open fireplace, wherein blazed a great fire; a table covered with documents, and bearing a silver candlestick having three sconces and three lighted candles; a massive carved oak chair near by the blazing logs, and, therein, the figure of one well advanced in years; a man with thin white hair and a skin like old parchment, with a huge emaciated frame, and large bony hands resting upon the chair-arms; far beneath the protruding and all but hairless brows, small eyes, strangely filmed, yet having a kind of lustre almost reptilian} an oppressive atmosphere—yet a sense of chill that seemed to emanate from the black-clad figure in the chair—such was John Ramsay's impression of the place and of its occupant—Count Hugo of Klaien.

For possibly a minute there was complete silence, while the Count sat with his peculiar eyes fixed upon the face of the messenger before him; and, indeed, John Ramsay's countenance was worthy of scrutiny. It was as though some cunning sculptor had roughly hewn an heroic head and left incomplete what, finished, would have been a masterpiece. The man had been handsome were he less rugged. As nature had made him he was simply strong—physically strong. ruddy and hirsute, and with a rather small, strongly aquiline nose, a hard mouth, and a long jaw that spoke of inflexible purpose.

"You have papers of import from our beloved cousin, Francis of Liemar?"' said the Count, suddenly.

Ramsay bowed stiffly, and removed his steel cap, which, despite the disfavour wherewith the chamberlain had constantly eyed the headpiece, he had obstinately worn in the Count's presence. From some place in the intenor he produced a packet, bound and sealed with the great seal of Liemar. This he handed to the Count—and immediately replaced the cap upon his head.

"Sir," said Hugo, with irritation, "you are a strange, uncourtly ambassador: r for our Royal neighbour to send to us. To what is Liemar come when common soldiers are entrusted with such missions!"

John Ramsay's ruddy face grew a shade paler. "Count," he replied, speaking the tongue with a barbarous accent, you are of ancient line—of the house of Fehlstcin. I, John Ramsay, can boast of blood as good, mayhap better. Of the embassy that journeyed from Liemar to present these documents at the Castle of Grunzburg, I alone remain. I am a plain soldier, and I only strive to do my duty. I wear my steel cap, without disrespect, to protect my skull."

"Ha!" said the Count, darting a quick glance at the chamberlain—"you are a man of spirit, and independent at that. But"—dropping his regal manner—"what do I understand? What evil chance, then, befell, whereby the learned Councillor von Kempen and all of his train are no more?"

"We were beset in the passes by a hundred armed robbers," answered Ramsay, shortly. "I alone survive; and, having possessed myself of the documents, I am here to present them to your Excellency, and to convey to his Highness whatever reply you may entrust to me."

"The Black Bear!" cried Hugo—"the man of blood and rapine! This is too much! That he should presume to lay hands upon a Councillor of Liemar!"

"Do I gather," inquired Ramsay, "that no mission from Liemar has reached your Excellency?"

"No message, good or ill, has come from Liemar to Grunzburg since I, the humble Hugo of Klaiicn, have been Regent of Fehlstein."

"Then what of the holy Canon who journeyed hither in the first month of the year? What of the noble Heinrich Ritterstock, who set forth but six weeks agone? What of these two, and what of those who journeyed with them ?" John Ramsay fixed his bright blue eyes scornfully upon the man before him. ‘‘Are such as these to be butchered in your mountains while you sit idle in sight of the shambles? Within three hours of the city, Johann von Kempen, beloved of all in Liemar, was slain by robbers, and, with him, a score other faithful subjects of the Prince! With murder done at your very gates, what wonder if I fear for my skull in a land so robber-ridden!"

The Count sprang up with surprising agility, and gripped the back of his chair so that the knuckles stood out white upon his large hand, "Captain Ramsay," he said, harshly, "you are presumptuous!"

"I speak my mind," came the short reply. "Owing to the unfortunate state of Fehlstein, I find myself in my present position. I have presented that letter, which should have come by another hand, whereby you know my business; and, in the document which you hold, Francis, Prince of Liemar, makes formal offer of his hand in marriage to your ward, the Duchess Blanche of Fehlstein. I am no ambassador, save by evil chance, but a plain man-at-arms, so I can make no plea on the Prince's behalf. I can only bear to him your answer."

Hugo of Klaiien stood gripping the chair-back, and glancing from the chamberlain to Ramsay. At the end of his speech he wallowed, as though his resentment were some bitter potion, and forced a smile to his lips—a smile wherein his filmed eyes played no part.

"Captain Ramsay, Ambassador of Liemar," he said, "overlook my hasty utterance, I am old and growing querulous! Not another day shall pass ere a punitive force be sent against Ludovic the Bear. His depredations grow insupportable. Von Colberg will conduct you to your apartment, and, in the morning, you shall have audience of her Highness, the Duchess."

He bowed with a courtly grandeur not unimpressive, whereupon John Ramsay saluted stiffly, spun round upon his heel, and followed the chamberlain from the Count's presence.

The apartment which had been allocated to the ambassador extraordinary from Liemar was small, low-ceiled and panelled, and had a large fireplace containing a blazing fire; in short, it was not unlike that wherein the interview with Hugo had taken place. This similarity, extending as it did to the unusual hexagonal shape, served to arouse John Ramsay's

curiosity; so that, having assured himself of the security of the door, he threw open the solitary window and looked out.

A breeze had come from the west, bringing light, fleeting clouds, whereby the moon was sometimes partially and sometimes wholly obscured; but, through-the clear air, the entire valley below was easily discernible. Grunzburg lay beneath him, slumbering peacefully, the moonlight furtively dancing upon the water flowing under the ancient bridge, and fashioning luminous shadows in the narrow, tortuous streets, Beyond, where the green of the corn was turning to gold and the outlying farmsteads dotted the slope, he traced the road by which he had travelled, marking its course up the mountain side almost to the mouth of the pass wherein he had left his companions lying in their blood—whence he, having with his own hand sped six of the marauders to their ultimate account, had escaped, unobserved, with the documents from Liemar.

Leaning perilously from the casement, he looked upward and downward—and then quietly reclosed the window. As he had suspected, he was lodged in the south-west tower of the fortress, and immediately below the apartment of the Count. By such devious ways had he been conducted there, that he had completely lost his bearings amid the maze of dim passages; but his location was now evident. Above was Hugo of Klauen, and below, the base of the tower and the living rock, with the river flowing at the foot of all. Turning his attention to the panelling, the wary soldier examined the six sides of the room, paying especial attention to a panel hard by the fireplace, which returned a more hollow sound to his soft rapping than any of the others. Further inquiry led to the discovery that this panel was very slightly loose.

Bulking these facts together, and gratuitously adding certain evil rumours that had been whispered even so far abroad as Liemar, John Ramsay admitted to himself that, regarded impartially, his situation was not all that a Scottish gentleman might desire. The discovery—which rewarded his skill in noiselessly opening the door and peering along the passage—that a guard stood at the end, served only to confirm his unfavourable impression of Grunzburg.

To a table, spread with a tempting collation, his eye wandered hungrily; but, having submitted the viands to a close scrutiny, he reopened the window and threw his supper into the river, also emptying out the wine—and contented himself with a simple repast of meat and bread which he took from the saddle-bag lying in a corner, where, together with the rest of his portable property, it had been placed at his request. This Spartan fare he moistened with a draught from his flask; and, first cleansing and binding up his wounded head, he made himself as comfortable as circumstances permitted—not in the bed, but on the floor in the black shadows behind it.

Even if his proceedings had been watched, he told himself that he was now prepared for whatever might befall.

The fire burned lower and lower on the hearth, and he listened intently, in a vain endeavour to account fora muffied roaring that seemed to come from somewhere beneath his feet. Hour after hour wore on, till the fire was but a mass of smouldering ashes and the moonbeam that streamed, intermittently, through the window had crept from panel to panel, until it picked out the quaint carven device upon the loose one by the fireplace. The muffled roar continued without abatement, and the weary watcher had grown used to the sound, and was, indeed, beginning to doze, when a fresh noise attracted his attention, and set him instantly upon the alert. Fixing his eyes upon the suspicious panel and crouching close beside the bed, he began to snore stertorously.

A soft creak, an opening along the bottom of the panel, and a ghostly hand appeared out of the aperture. A cloud obscured the moon, but from the shadow came another creak. The cloud passed, and the pale light streamed again across the floor, to reveal the figure of a man framed in the black gap where the panel had been—a sallow-faced man, with dark pointed

beard and moustache. His eyes glanced rapidly around the room, or, rather, his right eye did so. His left eye seemed in disagreement with its fellow, for it swung up, independently, as though to survey the ceiling. By this eye John Ramsay knew the man.

Stepping slightly forward, he of the odd eye took up the wine-flask from the table and turned to one who followed him through the aperture. The second midnight prowler was

Von Colberg, the chamberlain; and the two, holding up the empty flask in the moonlight, and hearing the heavy snores from the bed, showed their teeth together in satisfied smiles.

"'Twas the wine," said John Ramsay to himself, regretfully, "and I threw away the trout and the capon!"

Gathering courage from the apparent coma of their victim, the two came boldly towards the bed, and Von Colberg drew from beneath his doublet a long, slender stiletto. Bending forward he laid his hand, in the darkness, upon that spot where he assumed the heart of the drugged man to be located. A saddle-bag and other articles being artistically arranged there, surprise at the contour of the recumbent form was the last emotion Von Colberg knew in life.

The shriek of a great blade hewing the air, a dull thud, a sound as of something spurting upon the oaken floor—and he of the eye stood smitten rigid with fear as the headless trunk of the Grand Chamberlain of Fehlstcin collapsed, slowly, at his feet!

Helpless as a man of stone he stood, his left eye for once co-operating with its fellow, for both were fixed, in a glassy stare, upon the vague figure holding the huge, ensanguined sword. Through the darkness he saw that awful blade, and, as he glared, felt the point at his throat.

"Speak," said a voice, "and——!"

John Ramsay came forward into the moonlight and confronted the terror-stricken assassin. Skilfully he searched him and took possession of a murderous dagger. "What had you to do when I was despatched?" he demanded.

The man had no words; but the point of a sword is peerless

as a maitre d'clocution.

"My lord captain," he gasped, "we had to report that——"

"That I had departed—quite so! Go, now, before me, up the stairs, and stand within the door. Report that you have despatched me and then return. I shall be behind you!"

Not daring to demur, the fellow passed through the opening in the panel and up a steep, narrow stair, John Ramsay having a finger hooked in his belt behind, and the point of his sword against his spine. A gleam of light showed, presently, that they were come to the chamber above.

"Go on!" whispered the grim Scot.

The panel flew up, and the Count's apartment was revealed. Hugo still occupied the great carved chair, and he was so close that, had he so desired, Ramsay could have easily slain him, Turning his filmed eyes towards his emissary, he raised his brows in a silent query.

(to be concluded.)

THE GRAPHIC, SEPTEMBER 26, 1908

A MISSION TO GRUNZBURG

Written by - - - -
A. SARSFIELD WARD.
Illustrated by - - -
W. G. SIMMONDS.

PART II

"It is done!" said the man, rapidly.

"Wine or steel?" came the cynical voice.

"Steel!" replied the other, shuddering at the prick of the point in his back.

"Good!" muttered Hugo. Then aloud, he added, "Down with his red rat's carcass! with it!" And waved his hand in dismissal.

Back to the room below crept the cowed ruffian, the uncomfortable point, on this occasion, against his breast, as the Scot descended slowly before him.

"Is he like to come here?" asked Ramsay, when the lower panel was reclosed.

"No," replied the man. "He never looks upon them!"

This reply struck John Ramsay as being full of significance.

"Proceed with your work," he ordered. "Where do you throw them?

"The cave——"

"Where is this cave?"

The man indicated the door in the panelling, and, with a rim nod, John Ramsay helped him to drag the body of the chamberlain across the floor, and soon was again upon the hidden stair, this time descending, with one hand holding the feet of Von Colberg, his fingers hooked in the velvet shoes, and with the other carrying the great sword. So they proceeded, the fellow who went first bearing the weight of the body, and chattering with dread of the man who came behind him. The roaring sound grew louder as they descended, until it became evident to Ramsay that it was occasioned by rapidly running water. From the distance they had come, he judged that they must be below the foundations of the castle, and, as if to confirm his impression, the stair ended -and they were stumbling down a steep path, burrowing sull further into the heart of the rock of Grunzburg. The air was damp and chill, and the sound of the water almost deafening. Then a faint light came from some mysterious source, so that he could vaguely discern the figure of the man before him. They had emerged into a small cave, and the fellow's voice came, "Lay him down —the torch."

Followed always by the long sword, the man produced from a niche a pine-torch and materials with which he ignited it. This being stuck in an iron ring fastened to the wall, John Ramsay was enabled to survey the gloomy chamber wherein he now stood.

It was some twenty feet square, being evidently a natural cavern artificially enlarged; and in what he assumed to be the northern wall a black gap marked the opening of a low tunnel. The furniture of this place was of a terrifying description, consisting of racks, screws, boots, branding-irons, and other dreadful instruments of like character. The man of the eye knelt in a corner of the roughly levelled floor, and, by means of a rusty metal ring, raised a square stone slab, whereupon the sound of rushing waters became even louder, and a current of air swirled around the chamber, almost extinguishing the flame of the torch. Grasping Von Colberg's body by the heels, he dragged it to the opening, and, with averted eyes, toppled the gruesome form into the blackness.

Even the sturdy soldier, who had earned for himself the soubriquet of "Iron John," was unable to check the shudder which that sight, and the thought it: inspired, visited upon his person. Turning abruptly, he said, "You were of those who fell upon us in the mountains! What bas Hugo of Klanen, Regent of Fehlstein, to do with Ludovic the Bear?"

Again the man grew wordless; but, at the approach of the sword-point, he burst out with a confession such as must have strained Jobn Kannay's credulity had he not known what he knew already. In a perfect torrent of words poured forth the story of Castle Grunzburg—of the young Duchess Blanche and of Hugo, her guardian.

The Regent by a statute of the late Duke, remained absolute head of the State during the minority of the orphan Duchess, oo until her marriage, when the regency passed to her consort. Since her romantic meeting with the Prince of Liemar in the previous year, she had been seen but little outside the city: and now John Ramsay learned why. She was virtually a prisoner in her own apartments! Not easily coerced, she resolutely defied her guardian, who had his own dark plans for her future. For the past three months she, and the one waiting-woman who had proved incorruptible, had been watched, night and day—to prevent communication with those of the officers of Grunzburg, who, were the truth known to them, would have defended their beautiful Duchess with their hives.

"It is given out, Excellency," the man declared, almost incoherent in his fright. "that she lies ill of a lingering sickness. The soldiery and the burghers know not the truth—nor suspect it. Count Hugo must have time for his plans to mature. Had the embassies from Francis reached him (and all Grunzburg known of their coming) his projects were ruined.

In the mountains we waylaid them! All were slain, save only the holy Churchman. He lies in a dungeon here! Ludovic the Bear! There is no Ludovic the Bear! He and his followers were routed from their mountain fastness, and a company of Hugo's mercenaries installed there! Sometimes I, and sometimes Von Colberg, took command. Yesterday I had returned, secretly, and reported that none of the mission from Liemar—whereof we had news of the coming-were alive; but you won through to give me the he; and so to me fell the task of making good —! Secrecy must be observed. We of the Count's number scarce half a score; the garrison, to a man, are the Duchess's, and the burghers ever ready to shout for her and for Francis of Liemar. There is a secret mode of entrance and egress, by which we come and go, and, also, there is a passage communicating with the apartments of the Duchess."

At this point Ramsay checked his flow of words, "Lead me to the Duchess," he said.

For a moment the other hesitated, taken aback by the limitless daring of the Scotsman. In the flickering torch-light he stared at the grim and ominous face, and perceived in the light blue eyes that which hastened his acquiescence. Taking the flaming torch from the ring, he led the way into the black mouth of the tunnel, followed by the captain and the long sword.

It proved to slope rapidly upward, the air growing ever fresher. until, the guide unlocking a low iron door, they emerged into a chapel, Crossing from north to south (neither the ruffian with crimes innumerable on his soul, nor the grim Celt, omitting to bow the knee before the altar), they descended to the crypt, and then plunged into a veritable maze of subterranean passages, They were mounting a stair that evidently led again to the surface, when Ramsay spoke, softly, "Lead me into a trap," he said, "and——!"

"My lord Captain," replied the man, hastily, unlocking another door, "you are in her Highness's apartments! "

John Ramsay looked about him, and realised that the man spoke the truth, They actually stood in what was evidently the anteroom of the bedchamber, and directly before them was a heavily curtained doorway, beside which, upon a couch, a woman lay dozing. Of those about the Duchess, she alone had remained, save for spies; and now, in this time of terror, she lay nightly a faithful watcher at her mistress's door. Ax they entered, she started up, and, seeing before her the sinister apparition bearing the great sword, pulled aside the curtains and staggered, inarticulate with terror, into the apartment beyond.

Uncertain how to act, the Scot, cannily keeping a stout hold upon the leather girdle of his guide, stood looking after her. The situation was critical, allowing of little time for reflection; yet, scarcely knowing what to do, he paused irresolute, and, while he hesitated, wondering how he should gain speech of the Duchess, the problem was solved.

The hangings parted again, and a white-clad figure appeared—a girlish, graceful figure, with bright tresses that fell, unbound, about gleaming shoulders peeping from the broidered

night-robe, tresses that hung below the stim waist, and shone, in the light of the solitary candle illuminating the room, like burnished bronze. The face—a beautiful oval face was pale, the arms outstretched, the brave eyes bright.

"I am ready," said the Duchess. "Do your work!"

The simple words told a pitiful tale, a tale of long days of misery and nights of dread. The Scotsman pulled himself up with a slight frown.

"Your Highness," he replied "I can believe that appearances are against me; yet am I no bloody assassin, but John Ramsay, Captain of the Archer Guard of Francis of Liemar."

"Francis! You are from Francis!" The colour came and went in her cheeks; her big eyes watched the face of the man before her-noting the bandaged head, noting the curved host, the grim mouth — divining, with womanly quickness, the simple honesty and unflinching courage of this stranger who had appeared out of the night. With all his roughness of exterior, the Scottish captain was unmistakably a man of good blood; but ancient lineage counts for little, as this girl—for she was no more-knew to her cost. It was not, then, his noble bearing which reassured her, It was simply that her instinct showed her this rough solder of fortune to be a man such as a woman can trust.

Gone was the haughty pride that had never deserted her through the past weeks of torment and doubt— that had upheld her, calm and regally scornful, when she rose in her night-robes and confronted him whom she believed to be her appointed executioner, Duchess Blanche of Fehistem sank upon her knees and buried her beautiful face in her hands.

"Oh, God," she whispered, "I thank You - I thank You! My prayers are answered. You have sent me a friend!"

Then she rose, the quick red flushing her cheeks as she glanced down at her long, clinging garment, But John Ramsay gave her no time to speak. Your Highness," he said quickly, "attire yourself with all speed. We must immediately leave the castle."

"But every exit from my apartments watched, and Lam cut off, in this remote wing, from all aid."

"Go, Duchess, and prepare," he responded.

"We will find a way."

She never thought of questioning this strong, masterful man, but went like an obedient child! As she passed beyond the curtained door, Ramsay turned to his unwilling companion with one of his abrupt queries."Where is the secret exit?" he demanded.

"From the crypt," was the answer.

"To where?"

"The river. We can gain the Lower Town. There are stairs to a ledge beside the underground stream."

So it came about that, wrapped in a dark travelling cloak and accompanied by her one faithful attendant, the Duchess of Fehistein fled secretly from the castle that was hers by right of her ancient line from the iron-Lound home of her race. Protected by a foreign soldier, and guided by a foiled assassin, she bravely journeyed by the underground path, and fearsome path it was to follow, that narrow, sloping y beside the inky torrent that poured from the bowels of the rock to leap downward to the river. The tunnel was barely high enough for a man to walk upright, and the roof and sides were dripping with moisture, After heavy rains the path was impracticable, said the man of the eye, who went first, bearing the torch; and, indeed, Ramsay was not sorry when he stood again beneath the blue of heaven.

"I dare swear Von Colberg came down quicker!" he said.

That night the house of Peter Dekker, Burgomaster of Grunzburg, was honoured by the presence of Duchess Blanche of Fehlstein, who, accompanied by a pale-faced serving lady, knocked and begged hospitality of his good dame like any poor homeless wayfarer.

. . . . . .

Huge of Klauen suspected that all was not well with his affairs; he had a presentiment that something unpleasant was about to happen which presentiment was due to the discovery in the room reserved for privileged guests (such as the ambassador from Liemar) of the decapitated head of Von Colberg. This, he argued, together with the absence of the chamberlain's trunk, pointed to a flaw in the domestic arrangements of Castle Grunzburg. Upon summoning the man of the eye, and learning that he, too, was missing, the Count had serious misgivings.

Unable, for obvious reasons, to act otherwise than circumspectly, he spent the early part of the day following the coming of John Ramsay in no very placid state of mind. Those of the men who, seeking for preferment, hail attached themselves to the Regent, seemed less obsequious than usual—or so he imagined; and Captain Maurice, the same who had received Ramsay on his arrival, almost openly refused to obey some order he gave him. For a moment he glared upon that insolent soldier, but something in the air of the guardroom, wherein this rencontre took place, caused him to change his mind about ordering the captain's arrest, and, instead, he strode from the place with evil things in his heart. Racked with dreadful doubts, he yet found himself impotent to put matters to the test, That his power, in some occult fashion, had slipped from him during the night like a discarded garment, he now fully realised, The garrison was virtually in revolt; yet, burdened with the knowledge of his secret deeds, he dared not act—he could only pace up and down his apartment like a caged wild thing. What had gone awry?) Who had betrayed him? The gruesome secret of the guest-chamber could be known to none other than himself and those who dared not speak, The Scotsman! This mysterious atmosphere of impending ruin was in some way due to him; yet—the man with the eye had despatched him; had he not reported so? had not he, Hugo, heard the sounds from below that told of his body being dragged to the cave? But why had no report Leen made of Von Colberg's death? Where was the man of the eye? Hugo grew distracted.

At midday the first blow fell. He learnt that the Duchess was not in her apartments!

Some inkling of the truth began to dawn upon the darkness in his mind, when, upon summoning his personal attendant, he was answered by a man-at-arms whom he knew to Le a favourite of his young ward's.

"Send Bohmer," he said, quickly, eyeing the man with open disfavour.

"He has gone, Excellency."

"He was here this morning."

"He has gone."

"Gone! Gone where?"

"I cannot say, Excellency."

"Then send Gratz."

"He has gone, Excellency!"

So it was with all whom he thought he could trust; and so it was that he began to see the jest that Fate had played upon him, He, whose jests with racks, thumbscrews, and the underground torrent had been so many, was now called upon to laugh, in turn!

He dismissed the man, and, although now in a state of almost pitiable apprehension, waited until nightfall ere taking a decisive step. Then, as the guard was being set, he came out into the courtyard, booted and cloaked, and called for his horse to be brought. Captain Maurice was on duty, and from his lips he heard what he knew to be the verdict of his debasement.

"You cannot leave the Castle, Excellency."

"By whose orders?"

"By order of her Highness the Duchess!"

The Count turned, without a word, and strode to the chapel. Into the blackness of the crypt he descended, and, with the key he always carried with him ade to open the secret door.

It was barred from the inner side!

Then did Hugo of Klaucn see how truly the tables were turned; for he knew himself a prisoner in Castle Grunzburg!

. . . . . .

Many days passed, until a morning dawned when he heard the bells ringing in the town below; when he heard the shouts of the people. From his window he looked down, and the town was bedecked with banners and flags. The streets were alive with moving figures, some in the black and gold of Felilstein, some in the gala dress of burghers, and some in a uniform at the sight whereof he hastily closed the lattice and strode about the place raving like a madman, It was the livery of Liemar! It was the marriage of Francis of Liemar to Blanche of Feblstein!

Seated by the flaming logs, in the great oak chair, he heard the trumpets in the courtyard; he heard the ringing of the chapel bell, and sat immovable as a graven image. Some there were who looked in at the door, but he seemed unaware of their presence, sitting staring into the flames—and so they left him. Only when he received a touch on the shoulder did he look up, and then his yellow features became instantly contorted with furious rage. John Ramsay stood quietly watching him.

"Your Excellency is awaited in the Hall of Justice," he said.

Two men-at-arms appeared, and stood one on either side of the gaunt figure in the chair, The Count's eyes glanced, momentarily, to the door in the panelling; then, composing his features in a masklike immobility, he rose and followed the man to whom he owed the loss of a dukedom.

In the ancient Hall of Justice, Francis of Liemar presided over a tribunal of nobles and citizens of Fehlstcin, met to pass sentence upon the man who had ruled them from this very stronghold wherein they now gathered. Such was justice in Grunzburg. Francis, Regent but a few hours, was called upon to pass judgment on his predecessor, and that this court would hesitate at the extreme penalty, if such sentence seemed fitting, none could suppose who saw the stern, set faces turned towards Hugo as he entered. Neither his age nor his dignity (for now, in his hour of shame, he carried himself regally) could move hearts steeled to the prayers of a beautiful Duchess—to the tears of a newly made bride.

Looking to the farther end of the hall, the Count perceived there the man of the eye, Bohmer, Gratz, and others who hail been his confidants. He saw the captured leaders of the band with which he had supplanted that of Ludovic the Bear. He saw the holy Canon of St. Mark's, who had come in peace from Liemar, and who bad been dragged, under cloak of night, to the secret entrance, and incarcerated in a filthy dungeon.

He heard the list of his misdeeds or of some of them recited to the court; of how he had maltreated his ward, and grossly abused his high trust; of how he had murdered scores of peaceful travellers, well knowing that the work would be laid to the account of the Bear; of how he had sought to assassinate John Ramsay.

Then he heard the grave voice of the President, demanding of him what he had to say in his defence.

Complete silence followed the question, all eyes being set upon the arraigned man. The bright sunlight flooded the hall, streaming in through the open windows, and the murmur of

the river flowing around the rock of Grunzburg could be plainly heard. Even an occasional voice from the town, far below, sounded faintly, or a snatch of a song was waited through the clear air—for the citizens kept holiday in honour of their young Duchess's marriage to the husband of her choice, All nature seemed peaceful, and the valley a valley of rest.

Upright between his guards stood Hugo of Klauen, his gaze set upon the grim face of John Ramsay, who stood beside Francis on the dais. The filmed eyes blazed out into sudden malignancy as he raised his clenched hands and shook them, in frenzied malediction, at the Scottish captain.

For an instant he stood thus, his whole quivering body bespeaking devilish anger; then, ere a hand could be raised to stay him, he bounded to an open window, leapt into the casement, and cast himself down into the flowing stream, two hundred feet below!

THE END